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ABSTRACT

This report reviews research related to the home learning environment and presents a study on the home learning environment of young Hispanic children. Research has progressed from concern with home learning environment variables such as ethnicity, socio-economic variables and demographic characteristics to more relevant issues concerning experiences in the home and their effect on the cognitive and affective performances of children. A study compared the home learning environment of agrarian migrant Puerto Rican families (n=20) and non-migrant Puerto Rican families (n=20) in two Pennsylvania communities. The selected families with one child between the ages of 5 to 8 participated in a teacher-parent education program. Data were collected through community observation and home visits conducted by graduate students using various instruments that measure home environment variables. The study found statistically significant higher mean scores for migrant families on subscales of parental aspirations for their child, concern for the use of language, and parental reinforcement of aspirations. Both migrant and nonmigrant families believed in an environmental learning theory concerning children's intellectual development. Migrant families serve as a critical and faciliative role for newly arriving families in the community. Developmental differences revealed a more optimistic point of view by parents of younger learners in this study when compared to a previous study with 10-13 year olds. Implications are discussed for future research, practice, and policy in early childhood education of Hispanic children. (LP)

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Hispanic Families as Learning Environments for Young Children

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Gratitude is expressed to Mrs. Lillian Negron, doctoral student, and the graduate students in Penn State's COMP-BI-ECE Program for assistance with data collection and analysis; and the families who were so willing to share their time and insights.

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Abstract

Insights into the educational role families play in the lives of their offsprings needs to be shared with early childhood educators, who become caretakers and significant individuals in the lives of young Hispanic children. The purpose of this manuscript is to: (a) examine the historical context of the home learning environment research; (b) relay a study viewing the home learning environment of young Hispanic children; and (c) discuss the implications for future research, practice, and policy in early childhood education.

Introduction

In light of the demographic trends indicating that Hispanics will comprise the largest minority group by the turn of the century (Valdivieso & Davis, 1988), and an increasingly homogeneous teaching force (Grant & Secada, 1989); it appears critical to disseminate information about growing numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse young learners. Hispanic subgroups in our nation share historical and linguistic commonalities with unique geographic and cultural themes.

The diversity among Hispanic subgroups stems from a rich heritage based upon countries of origin including Central America, the Caribbean, South America, Spain, and mainland generational cohorts. Hispanic sub-groups have joined our nation as a result of both colonization and immigration. National sociopolitical issues have surfaced regarding the acceptance of Hispanics by the majority group resulting from linguistic and cultural diversity e.g., English-Only Movement. Currently the Hispanic population is comprised of Mexican-Americans, the largest sub-group with 62%, followed by Puerto Ricans making up 13%, Cubans 5%, Central and South Americans 12%, and others 8% (Valdivieso & Davis, 1988).

The dissemination of research to educators, and policy makers may begin to alleviate recurrent sociopolitical deficit philosophies and

stereotypical notions. Providing information about the lives of culturally and linguistically diverse young learners will assist in decision making and the implementation of culturally congruent practices. Insights into the educational role Hispanic families play in the lives of their offsprings needs to be shared with early childhood practitioners in particular, who become caretakers and significant individuals in the lives of young Hispanic children.

The purpose of this manuscript is to: (a) examine the historical context of the home learning environment research; (b) relay a study viewing the home learning environment of young Hispanic children; and (c) discuss the implications for future research, practice, and policy in early childhood education.

Historical Context

Impetus for the home environment research was provided by Bloom (1964) who explained that the first ten years of a child's life-span is the period of most rapid development of human characteristics crucial to school success. Bloom proposed that the environment provides a network of conditions, forces, and external stimuli which affect the individual. The environment was thus conceived as a shaping and reinforcing force which is composed of a number of sub-environments. In order to understand a particular characteristic is is necessary to identify

the related sub-environments. Bloom and his doctoral students have examined the environmental correlates of children's cognitive and affective measures.

Research focusing on the educational nature of the home learning environment can be categorized as explaining (a) structural functional variables, or (b) family process variables. Investigators interested in the structural functional variables have emphasized macrovariables such as ethnicity, socio-economic variables, and demographic characteristics.

One example of structuralist research resulted in the model proposed by Zajonc and Markus (1976) which attempts to explain the effects of birth order, spacing, and family size on intelligence. The latter referred to as the "Confluence Theory," maintains that the intellectual value of the home environment can be obtained by summing the mother's IQ plus the father's IQ to the child's intellectual score, which is then divided by the number of people in the family. The model proposes that unless there is sufficient age-spacing between children the intellectual environment in the home becomes diluted. Research is available to both support and dispute this theory (Henderson, 1981).

Researchers interested in the home environment have found that status characteristics account for a small portion of a child's educational achievement and have felt that these variables do not provide enough

specific information for parents and schools (Henderson, 1981; Kalinowski & Sloane, 1981; Soto, 1986; Walberg & Marjoribanks, 1976). The more important issue revolves around the experiences provided in the home or the process variables. This research has evolved from a structural functional approach to one which is more concerned with process variables.

The family process variables researchers (Bloom, 1964; Clark, 1983; Dave, 1963; Keeves, 1974; Laosa, 1984; Marjoribanks, 1979; Soto, 1986; Weiss, 1969; Wolf, 1964) have examined the home learning environment as it relates to children's cognitive and affective performance. Laosa (1982), for example, proposes a theoretical model in which parent-child interactions act as a mediating variable between social status and children's attributes. Soto (1991) found dimensions of process variables affected differential school achievement; while Marjoribanks (1987) found that families may act as a critical substratum influencing relations between children's attitudinal and cognitive attributes. This research has provided a rich base for theoretical possibilities and has evolved from large scale statistical designs, to moderately sized and smaller samples, with an increasingly qualitative orientation.

Soto (1990) maintains that research viewing the home learning environment needs to extend its scope by exploring broader ecological perspectives incorporating the relationship among contexts. The rationale for this is based upon Bronfenbrenner's (1979) contention that the quality of family life may be affected by a variety of systems thereby impacting children's learning. Bronfenbrenner uses a systems concept, illustrated by a set of nested Russian dolls, when proposing a broader approach to research viewing human development. Slaughter -Defoe, et al (1990) also maintain that a move toward thecries that emphasize cultural/ecological perspectives would benefit the family and achievement socialization and development literature.

The home learning environment of young Puerto Rican children

The greatest share of Hispanic families within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania have originated from the Caribbean island of Puerto Rico. Puerto Ricans living in the island and in the mainland are citizens of the United States as a result of the Jones Act of 1917.

The research viewing the home learning environment of Puerto Rican families was initiated by Soto (1986) with a study comparing higher and lower achieving children's home process variables. The following study is the first viewing the young Puerto Rican child's home learning environment and the first to incorporate a broader ecological

perspective by drawing comparisons among families with differing lifestyles (migrant and non-migrant families).

The theoretical orientation proposed is based upon the process home environment researchers as well as the theoretical perspectives of: a) Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Bronfenbrenner, Moen, and Garbarino (1984) who noted that a variety of systems impact children's learning; b) Slaughter - DeFoe, et al (1990) who emphasize the need for cultural ecological perspectives; and c) Soto's (1990) call for the home environment research to incorporate the relationship among ecological contexts.

LeVine (1988) distinguishes among parental strategies within agrarian societies and urban-industrial societies. The parental investment strategies described by LeVine help to explicate how family culture influences teaching and learning within the family system. The families chosen and interviewed for this study were migrant and non-migrant, living within an urban industrial society, with one set (migrant) relying on an agrarian subsistence.

The present investigation views the similarities and differences of the home learning environment for the two groups of families with similar characteristics, living in different communities. The agrarian migrant Puerto Rican families and non-migrant Puerto Rican families rely on

differing means of livelihood. The study centered on finding differential critical factors capable of impacting the family's role as a facilitator of children's learning. As a secondary focus, developmental differences were pursued by comparing the current sample of young learners (N=40) with a previous study of 10-13 year olds (N=59).

The research questions driving this study include:

1) Are there significant differences among the home learning environment of migrant and non-migrant families?

2) Are there critical factors among the two family types capable of impacting the educational role of the families? and;

3) Are there developmental differences in the home learning environment of this younger cohort sample, when compared with previous research?

The families for this study were chosen with the following criteria: a) of Puerto Rican heritage living within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; b) having one child between the ages of 5 to 8 years of age; c) willingness to participate in a teacher-parent education program designed to benefit young school-aged children; and d) were sub-divided into two sets of families (n=20 migrants plus n=20 non-migrants) residing in two separate communities.

The migrant families consider their home base to be east-central Pennsylvania; while the non-migrant families reside approximately 200 miles apart in eastern Pennsylvania. The data was collected by graduate students who were of Puerto Rican descent themselves and fluent Spanish-English speakers.

Individualized home visits were conducted by graduate student pairs in the family's preferred language. The Family Environment Schedule (Marjoribanks, 1979) was chosen because of its semi-structured format; a reliability in the Puerto Rican Spanish translated version of coefficient alpha .92 (Soto, 1986) and its established use as a measure of the home environment (Marjoribanks, 1979; Soto, 1986). The Family Environment Scale consists of items focusing on eight home environment press variables; a) Parental aspirations for the Child; b) Parental Aspirations for Themselves; c) Concern for the Use of Language; d) Parental Reinforcement of Aspirations; e) Knowledge of the Child's Educational Progress; f) Family Involvement in Educational Activities; g) Press for Independence; and h) Value Orientations. This measure has been used with ethnically diverse populations in Australia and Canada (Marjoribanks, 1979) and mainland Puerto Rican families (Soto, 1986).

Additional data sources included observations of community life, the Four Factor Index of Social Status (Hollingshead, 1976), the Home Screening Questionnaire (HSQ) (Coons et al, 1981), and the Beliefs About Development Questionnaire (BAD) (Martin, 1982). HSQ is a measure designed for the early identification of children "at risk" by a school of medicine; while the BAD is a 30 item questionnaire eliciting parental beliefs about children's development at different stages. The latter questionnaire provides a forced choice format to discriminate among three theoretical orientations by parents: (a) environmental-learning theory; (b) interactional-cognitive-developmental; and (c) maturational-biological.

First research question - Are there significant differences among the home learning environment of migrant and non-migrant families?

Insert Table 1 about here

Statistically significant differences were found on three of the eight process variables subscales of the Family Environment Scale. Table 1 indicates higher means for the migrant families on all but one of the subscales. The three subscales which were statistically significant

include Parental Aspirations for their Child, Concern for the Use of Language, and Parental Reinforcement of Aspirations.

The mean scores of the Beliefs About Development questionnaire indicated a learning theory orientation for migrant (X=13.85) and non-migrant (X=12.65) families, as a first choice. These families believe that the physical and social environment inclusive of teachers, peers, and parents effect changes in children's development. The second theoretical choice, revealing beliefs about development by migrant families, was the interactionist/cognitive developmental orientation (X=9.80), indicative of the importance of interactions among children's existing knowledge and the environment. While the second theoretical choice for non-migrant families included the maturational/biological orientation (X=8.30) purporting the gradual unfolding of genetically based potential.

Second research question - Are there critical factors among the two family types capable of impacting the educational role of the families?

Insert Table 2 about here

The contrasts among features of Community A, the migrant workers' home base; and Community B the non-migrant place of residence may appear subtle on the surface yet a variety of thematic issues continually affect the lives of the families in each setting.

Community A relies primarily on the cannery and farming industry for its subsistence and is comprised of large open spaces. The families we visited were dispersed within neighborhoods and lived in townhome dwellings. Ties with the Hispanic community were informal and infrequent due to the migratory nature of the jobs. These newly arrived citizens attended meetings coordinated by the Migrant Education Program of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and received information regarding community activities, services related to health, education, and housing. The salient features of the Migrant Education Program included the provisions of a supportive network, the ability to negotiate meanings among systems, educational teaching strategies earmarked for young learners, community information sharing, the provision of individualized specific needs and questions, a home based model, the establishment of social relations, and the discussion of relevant community issues.

The migrant families were a slightly older cohort, newly arrived residents, indicated a higher educational attainment, and were actively

involved in the Migrant Education Program. A close relationship among the migrant families ensued as a result of daytime social meetings (pot luck lunches) and individualized information sharing which served as a mediator among systems for families

Residents of Community B participate in a stable, well established community with a wealth of resources and a Hispanic community that is actively involved, well educated, middle class, taking pride in its ethnically diverse role models and leaders. The school district has sought creative culturally relevant program implementation and actively recruits linguistically diverse teachers to serve the needs of young Hispanic learners. This community with all of its advantages, however, has experienced an economic crisis with the advent of the collapse of its large industrial center. The families we visited were confined to the small quarters of the Public Housing Project facing recurrent drug issues.

The more stable non-migrant families were segregated from the affluence of the more established community, living in a segregated housing project, feeling the economic and emotional loss of employment, and experienced a higher school drop out rate.

The differences and similarities among these ethnically diverse families and the accompanying community resources helped to facilitate the family's educational role for their young children. In spite of similar

socio-economic status, the role of the wage earner determined stability or mobility for the families. The loss of an industrial center in one community impacted the non-migrant families as did the daily life within a housing project. The migrant families are more recent arrivals to the mainland and have obtained higher educational levels. The non-migrant families have lived longer in the mainland and have been affected by the "school drop out" phenomenon. It is evident that the cohesive migrant families participating in the Migrant Education Program, serve a critical and facilitative role for newly arriving families. The individualized face to face nature of the activities was seen as a strength by the families, providing personal and tailor made information.

Bronfenbrenner, Moen, and Garbarino (1984) found major gaps in the research viewing community influences on family functioning and the accompanying experiences at different stages of the life cycle. According to the latter authors the amount of empirical work in this area is meager since "community" or "neighborhood" are terms which are not perceived as important in the field of child development. The migrant families interviewed in this study indicated a willingness to provide information for new arriving families, as the latter negotiate among ecological systems. This critical and facilitative role serves to orient the families and facilitates adaptation to the mainland. It may be that the more agrarian lifestyle of

the migrant family system also lends itself to sharing among the families. The service orientation by these families toward one another is admirable as evidenced by the concept of "servicial."

Third research question - Are there developmental differences in the home learning environment of this younger cohort sample, when compared with previous research?

When the scores of the Family Environment Scale were compared to a previous study with 10-13 year olds (Soto, 1986) it was noted that the families of these younger cohorts placed greater restrictions on the younger learners (as measured by Independence subscale), scored lower on the Concern for the Use of Language subscale, obtained higher Family Involvement scores and higher Parental Aspirations for Themselves. It may be that parents of younger learners exhibit an even more optimistic outlook for their families, as measured by PAT, and FI. To place greater restrictions on younger learners appears developmentally appropriate; while the language issue is in need of additional research.

In conclusion it can be noted that the present investigation conducted a comparison of the home learning environment of migrant and non-migrant young Puerto Rican children. In spite of our constraints and limitations the findings include: (a) statistically significant differences in three of the eight family learning environment process

variables measured; (b) an environmental learning theory orientation by both migrant and non-migrant families; (c) the important role the migrant families play with newer arrivals acting as a mediator among ecological systems; and (d) developmental differences revealing a more optimistic point of view by parents of younger learners.

Discussion

This initial modest endeavor viewing the home learning environment of young Puerto Rican children has important implications for early childhood education. There is a great deal to be learned, by our society as a whole, from families who initiate the education of their youngest learners with optimism and high educational expectations. The willingness of migrant families to act as facilitators for more recent arrivals serves as an inspiration to a society in need of strengthening its existing family systems.

Future research needs to continue to dispel myths and stereotypical notions about Hispanic families who are keenly interested in how their children fare in school. The home environment research needs to continue to integrate broad theoretical frameworks viewing the contribution of family systems neighborhoods and communities.

Why is the initial optimism expressed by families of young recent arrivals to the mainland not maintained? Why do the more recent

arriving families possess additional educational skills and degrees than families who have lived in the mainland for over twenty years? What role does language play within the Hispanic family's daily interactions? Are there perceptions of developmental differences by parents who indicated higher concern for the use of language? The learning theory orientation expressed by migrant and non-migrant families indicates a need for additional research viewing the role of beliefs about child development.

Teachers of young children face challenges and possibilities as they enter into relationships as caretakers and significant others of an increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse population. Colleges of Education need to examine the curricular content as well as the competencies of their graduates to address both the current and future needs of our nation. A multicultural perspective alone will not suffice, if graduates are unable to relate to the daily lives of ethnically and linguistically diverse young learners. Knowledge about parent education alone, may not provide needed information about individualized and collaborative approaches. Incorporating both the research knowledge base and guided community field experiences can be successfully implemented by Institutions of Higher Learning. Field experiences in particular will be valuable in helping early childhood educators to gain insights about culturally congruent practices.

Early childhood practitioners need to continue to pursue culturally congruent practices with regard to Hispanic families of young children. The voices of families who have been made to feel as if they are less than valued need to be heard and incorporated into the educational process. The concept of being "servicial" as expressed by migrant families' attempting to orient one another is once again highlighted. Practitioners need to be not only accepting of cultural and linguistic diversity but to be able to advocate on behalf of families whose values help to model cohesive human social relationships. The "caring curriculum" introduced by Hispanic families can serve as a resource for all of our young children.

Policy makers need to communicate, fund, and design options on behalf of young culturally and linguistically diverse family systems. The educational priorities we establish today will help to enhance future possibilities of our society. Teacher education, research, and bilingual early childhood education programs need to reflect the daily realities of Hispanic families. Retaining and enhancing the optimism expressed by families of young Hispanic children needs to become a priority in order to be translated into a bright educational future. Collaborative, insightful, non-deficit perspectives can help to highlight the strengths and positive

attributes of Hispanic families who continue to serve as learning environments for young children.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of the Family Environment Scale

	Migrant n=20		Non-Migrant n=20		
Subscales	M	SD	M	SD	t
PAC	30.70	6.74	27.75	3.37	1.75*
PAT	21.15	8.08	18.9	6.03	1.00
CUL	83.75	18.48	71.65	11.24	2.50**
PRA	24.20	7.51	13.75	3.11	5.75***
FI	73.65	12.61	74.10	9.74	-.13
KEP	14.35	6.66	11.60	3.99	1.58
Ind	112.90	37.10	100.90	23.36	1.22
Value	23.35	6.34	21.90	6.05	.74

PAC = Parental Aspirations for Child

PAT = Parental Aspirations for Themselves

CUL = Concern for the Use of Language

PRA = Parental Reinforcement of Aspirations

Table 1 (Continued)

Means and Standard Deviations of the Family Environment Scale

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FI = Family Involvement

KEP = Knowledge of Child's Educational Progress

Ind = Press for Independence

Value = Value Orientations

*p<.05

**<.01

***p<.001

Table 2

Family Characteristics

	Migrant	Non-Migrant
Occupation	Migrant workers	Factory, Menial, Unemployed
Length of Residency	Recent Arrivals	Approximately 20 Years
Ages of Parents	Mid to Late 20's	Late teens early 20's
Generational Cohort	First	Second
Educational Attainment	Grade 10, H.S., and University (2)	"Drop-out Phenomena"
Residence	Townhome	Housing Project
HSQ Scores	95% "suspect"	100% "suspect"
Life Style	Migratory	Stable